

Grandiose Plans: Avenue to expand to 3 lanes ADOT hears from residents

By Matt Loeschman

Independent Newspapers



Independent Newspapers/ **Rusty Bradshaw**

Sun City residents Dale Mabey, left, and Ray Ostrander look over maps of proposed construction work Dec. 2 during a public open house to gather resident input on the Grand Avenue widening project.

Help is on the way for Grand Avenue's traffic snarls.

The Arizona Department of Transportation reminded the public Dec. 2 that Grand Avenue will eventually be expanded to six lanes in each direction from Loop 303 to 99th Avenue.

Residents, community leaders and transportation officials gathered for an ADOT open house last week at Surprise Elementary School to discuss the progress of the expansion project.

"Grand provides connectivity to several jurisdictions," said Brock Barnhart of ADOT. "It is an important connector."

Mr. Barnhart backed up his statement with traffic counts that indicate this section of Grand Avenue will see nearly 30,000 vehicles per day passing through by 2010. By 2025, that number is expected to grow to 46,000 vehicles per day. Grand also connects metropolitan Phoenix with Las Vegas and Interstate 15. The lane expansion, expected to significantly improve traffic flow, is part of ADOT's Regional Transportation Plan that identifies a series of improvement projects along Grand Avenue between Loop 303 and McDowell Road, including additional lanes, grade separations, interchanges and other improvements. The RTP includes funding to widen Grand Avenue by one lane in each direction along segments between Loop 303 and Interstate 17.

"This project from Loop 303 to 99th Avenue is part of phase one of the RTP," Mr. Barnhart explained.

Other future phases will take place from 2011-2025.

Mr. Barnhart revealed no contractor is on board for the project. This process is expected to begin in mid-2009.

Construction on the project is expected to begin in fall 2009 and take about 18 months to complete, according to officials. This section of the Grand expansion is expected to cost about \$45 million, according to Mr. Barnhart.

Bob Hansman of Dibble Engineering outlined the scope of the improvements along Grand.

"Adding a third lane in each direction on Grand Avenue will increase capacity by 50 percent," he explained. "There are also plans for signalized intersection improvements and synchronization of signals to improve flow. Right now, motorists are frustrated with having to stop at nearly every signal along Grand Avenue."

Pedestrian area improvements are part of the project and rubberized asphalt will be used to minimize

traffic noise, Mr. Hansman explained.

Adjacent to the right lane will be an area wide enough for bike traffic. Larger fonts will be added to signs along the thoroughfare.

Further inspection indicates all lanes will not be the same width. The area south of the Agua Fria River will be slightly different than the north in terms of lane width.

Outside of Surprise, sound walls will be added between 108th and 111th avenues and also from Coggins Drive to 105th Avenue. There will also be pavement rehabilitation between 99th and 111th avenues.

Upgrades for pedestrians include wider waiting areas in medians along with countdown ADA-compliant pedestrian signals.



Independent Newspapers/ **Matt Loeschman**

Brock Barnhart, left, of ADOT speaks to Surprise District 6 Councilman Skip Hall, center, and Surprise Senior Transportation Planner Randy Overmyer during a Grand Avenue public forum on Dec. 2.

During the lane additions, there will be some daytime work but two lanes of traffic will always be flowing. The speed limit will drop from the normal 45 mph to 35 mph in the construction zone, Mr. Hansman said.

"Most construction will take place at night to not interrupt traffic flow and business access," said Daina Mann of ADOT.

Business access will be maintained at all times. Those in attendance were offered cards to pose questions to ADOT officials.

One business owner asked if they would be allowed to place signs along Grand Avenue indicating they were open during the construction.

"We will see if that becomes necessary in the future," Mr. Barnhart said.

Another resident argued for right-turn lanes at every intersection along Grand. Others said the two-lane turn lane at Thunderbird Road that merges into one lane must be addressed.

"We are working with the city of El Mirage on this issue," Mr. Barnhart explained.

Former Surprise Councilman Danny Arismendez, who operates a business in the area, had multiple questions. He wondered about the timing of the project.

"Why can't this be done during the summer?" he asked. "The snowbirds will return in the fall and we do all of our business at that time when you will be doing the construction."

Mr. Arismendez also wants sound walls in other areas along Grand Avenue.

"Is the train or the cars quieter near the Original Town Site?" he joked.

Mr. Barnhart said ADOT was building walls in two areas simply for traffic noise mitigation, not train noise. Studies showed where those walls should be built.

For more information on the Grand expansion project, visit www.valleyfreeways.com.

Post your opinions in the Public Issues forums at www.newszap.com. News Editor Matt Loeschman can be reached at 623-445-2871 or mloeschman@newszap.com.